

To Rue and the Ruined

by BlackRose108

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Summary: POST HTTYD2 (MAJOR SPOILERS FOR THE END OF THE MOVIE) - Aftermath Story. Hiccup and Toothless deal with the events following the sequel as they take their first slow and shaky steps into a new life. (Contains Hiccup/Astrid)

1. Sadly Rue

****One of the million and one ways I'm going to try and deal with the emotional trauma in How to Train Your Dragon 2. ****

****Clearly this takes place after the movie so if you haven't seen the sequel then I don't know why you're reading this because you'll be totally spoiled. ****

****But since I doubt we'll get to see Hiccup's post-Stoick mourning in canon (at least the very early stages of it) I decided to just make a good old-fashion "Aftermath" story that deals with Hiccup taking those first shaky steps into being chief, Toothless taking those first awkward steps into being the new alpha over the dragons of Berk, andâ€¦well everyone else's aftermath too. ****

****This first part basically happens the same day Drago is defeated, so all that rawâ€¦stuff is here, sorry.****

Chapter 1: Sadly Rue

The torches cast wrapped the ice broken town in a heated blanket of loss, but the embers floating forth rose a new sunrise of hope just above the dark clouds.

But the night remained, and the loss lingered.

A small stage was set for the new chief to step on and with it the hand of his mother, Valka, stood atop.

Hiccup wasn't told to give a speech, but he didn't see how he couldn't, not when the adrenaline faded and looked around at a battered village and a freshly fought chief.

His breath still winded, flight suit still sticky from sweat Hiccup lead his mother to the stage and took the biggest breath he could, trying to match Stock's powerful voice with his tiny lungs.

"E-everyone," was all he managed to stagger out. He looked around and saw nothing but torch glowing eyes, all on him, all looking for a sign of what to do next. He immediately turned to Valka, searching her for some kind of answer for what to say, but she stood attention, head up and lip bitten.

She was waiting. Waiting for _him. _

"Everyone." Hiccup cleared his throat. "Today we've won and we've lost. Our chief for four decades over has beenâ€¦" Hiccup swallowed the lump in his throat, or at least he tried. It remained just as awkwardly as the speech rolled on. "Our chief, Stoick the Vast, was killed in the line of battle to protect our village. Heâ€¦he gave his life in the most heroic way a chief can, and for that I _know _he's seated in Valhalla amongst the greatest our chieftains have to offer."

Hiccup's toes curled into the worn insides of his boot. The fabric hard, sweated, and his foot was cold and stiff. But still he straightened up, letting his toes keep biting into the fabric until it was raw.

"I am ready to take the throne, I only hope I can be all that my father wanted me to be." Hiccup finally turned to Valka, reaching out a hand, hers as cold as his. "But I'll have help. Out of the ashes of his situation my motherâ€¦Stoick's wifeâ€¦Valka has returned."

The crowd mingled in gasps of renewed surprised and utter shock. Some knew her, other's didn't.

"We've all been thrust into a new age on Berk. It's unexpected butâ€¦we'll make it through, if you'll have me as your chief. I'llâ€¦I'll do my best."

A hand squeezed his, Valka's hand, she was there with him, by his side now.

The silence of the crowd lingered for a moment before another roaring applause ruptured, shaking Hiccup's frame, steadily he stood until the applause died down and Gobber stepped in front, giving Hiccup's shoulder a pat.

"Good job, lad." Gobber said. "Take a rest, now." Gobber stood raising his hand. "Alright now, there should be enough furs around here to make suitable sleeping arrangements for everyone tonight. It's too late to start repairsâ€¦" Gobber looked around, taking a quick account of how many houses really _were _destroyed. He gulped when it was nearly all. "â€¦So the stars will be our shield tonight."

Hiccup began to move, Valka tugging him off the stage, Toothless

following suit.

"Are you going to be alright?" Valka asked, quietly enough but looking at both Hiccup and Toothless.

Hiccup glanced at Toothless, wishing the night fury could just answer for him. The battle was over, the night was settled, he could be sad now, he could relax now.

"Why don't you two justâ€|take a rest, aye?" Valka suggested.

Hiccup already knew Gobber was taking his reigns for the night, but he still felt odd about starting his first night as chief mourning to himself.

"But, I have toâ€|" Hiccup started though his mother's finger pushed his lips in.

"No, Hiccup, you have to make sure _you're _okay, you both do." She said, glancing at the night fury. "Both of your duties can wait until tomorrow."

"And, what about you, Mom, you'reâ€|"

She shook her head, putting on a smile. "Don't you worry about me, Hiccup." She said, pulling him close to her, a gentle hand smoothing the leather on his flight suit. "I've got a lot of comforting to catch up on."

Gobber continued to initiate the orders and Astrid looked up as she saw Hiccup exit the stage, his walk was slow, exhausted, and his mouth stayed open as breaths kept leaving him quick and heaving as he left his mother's embrace and rounded the corner near the cliff sides.

But she left him be. There was no telling what was running through his mind all at once. The day had been jarring enough but what was worse was that Astrid couldn't think of a single thing to say that would help him. Her eyes simply followed him as he departed from his mother, only taking Toothless with him.

She felt a nose at her side, Stormfly nudging at her. Normally such a gesture would warrant food, but the dragon's scales shook under her hand as she patted her spikes. Stormfly was still just as shaken as all the dragons were. It wasn't fun, being controlled like that. Thoughâ€|no dragon suffered more than Toothless.

"Astrid!" Eret called out in the distance and she snapped out of her haze.

Skull Crusher followed behind Eret, a little helplessly at that, and the dragon trapper seemed just as helpless in the matter.

"I um, I think Gobber wants you to help with organizing where everyone will sleep." He reported. Eret's eyes went over her shoulder at Hiccup retreating. "Unless you have other matters you want to attend to."

Astrid followed his eyes and still frowned as the new chief went off to himself and his night fury. She'd go see himâ€|later.

"I'll make sure everyone's taken care of." She told him and Skull Crusher kept nudging at Eret's side.

"Is heâ€"is he hungry?" Eret stumbled.

"No, he's just feeling the loss." Astrid said, giving his neck and scratch. "Just be there for him, that's all you can do right now."

Eret nodded, though there was no shaking the confused determination on his face.

Astrid made her way to Gobber, passing out furs and looking for safe areas amongst the village where there was no threat of ice falling to camp the many of the village whose homes were unable to be slept in that night.

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Hiccup let his back lay against Toothless, the biting cold numbed him that night instead of Toothless's warm skin heated him up, for the night fury was just as cold. They let their company mingle, but their thoughts were kept to their own.

Hiccup wasn't ready to talk, not yet. It was too fresh, too painful. He didn't even really know how to feel. He was sad, he was angry, he was guilty, he wasâ€"raw.

The only clear emotion he could pull out of the huddle was a gripping need. A hand that ripped out of his chest and wanted to grab onto as many of what he called his own as he could. Hold it close, keep it in every pocket he owned, and sew it shut as for it to never leave.

Their seclusion was constantly interrupted, though, dragons wandering to the cliff side they sat at, some coming forth with lost looks, other with gratitude. Toothless only gave one groan, and each time it seemed to be just enough to make them all go away.

"Don't come here right now," Hiccup imagined Toothless was telling them, and he leaned further into him, curling his legs into the side of the night fury's stomach and letting his hand rest on his leg. The gentle up and down swell of Toothless's breathing kept him in a lull, his thoughts staying singular and safe while the moon bathed them.

Stay, was the word Hiccup's mind kept uttered. To who and to what he didn't know, but stay kept cycling within him.

Hallow and dry, Hiccup stayed curled up into his night fury, his flight suit still smelling of nervous sweat, and his toes curled to a numb within his boot. He didn't want to change clothes, he didn't even know if his house was still standing.

Though it surprised him when he wished it was gone. He couldn't step foot in that house again with everything still intact, just as he left it before he left. Just as Stoick had left it before heâ€" |

"No," Hiccup muttered, waking up slightly from his daze, a little droll crusted in the side of his mouth and his fingernails broken and jagged bit into Toothless's side. The night fury was asleep, but he kept hearing the crinkles and cranking of Toothless's insides, a nervous kick in his leg that not even Hiccup's hand could still.

Hiccup needed to get up, to at least stretch his legs, but his body felt safe in its huddle. Not comfortable whatsoever, but safe.

"Hiccup?" Astrid called out to him.

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Valka had shed her outer armor as soon as the speech was finished. Everyone left her be for the time being, Gobber gratefully taking the lead in making sure everyone had a place to sleep. The ice bitten air seemed to pass over her skin with no reaction, she almost wished for it, for all she felt was Stoick's arms around her.

His hands on her arm, spinning her while a voice that shook mountains sang a sweet love song.

Cloud Jumper took her for a flight, swooping her up as she crawled up to his back, standing and watching the moon sparkle almost beautifully on the ice that broke through Berk.

She had taken to counting the stars each night for twenty years. But the stars over Berk, she had never counted, she had never flown over her own home. It was a new journey for her, though at the moment it was something to do, _anything _to keep her mind off of the day's events.

"How could I have gained so much yet lost so much?" She asked Cloud Jumper as he banked, a wisp of clouds wet her hair and face, but were only a familiar company to the steady tears falling on her cheeks.

She looked up into the sky, each star mocking her.

"I wonder which one you are, Stoick?" She asked. "At least let me know that much." No star blinked or twinkled any brighter, nothing changed, nothing indicated. And her eyes only welled up more.

"Tears and ice cold weather don't really mix, you know." Valka heard Gobber fly up. Grump wasn't suited for the elevation they were at, but the dragon tugged on.

"Just trying to find him." She sniffled.

"Ayeâ€|but he's not there yet. It's a journey he has to take. But he'll be there soon, don't you worry."

Valka could only nod.

"How's Hiccup?"

"He wanted to be alone with his dragon."

"Like mother, like son." Gobber smiled, though Grump let out a groaned, the elevation getting to him. "Alright, alright, hold steady." He nudged the side of Grump's face, pinching the thick skin. "Why don't you land for the night, eh?"

"I'm not going to leave if that's what you're worried about." Valka sighed. "I'm done runningâ€¦I've run for too long. So long, I guess the Gods wanted to punish me. I just wish they had done it without such a cruel tease."

"No one knows for sure what plans the Gods have. Punishment, tease, or fortune." Gobber began to descend. "I just try and live every day like it's my last. No unspoken words, no regrets."

"I'll give that a try from now on." Valka tried to laugh, but a breathy sigh only came out.

"Atta girl." Gobber still encouraged. "And why don't you sit down? You're making me nervous."

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Hiccup didn't know when the weight of his body against Toothless was lifted and suddenly placed on Astrid's chest and wrapped in the fur blanket she draped around them. Her hands slowly working through his hair, scaling over his scalp, words being whispered that he couldn't make out but sounded soothing. His eyes didn't register anything but a blur of feeling until much later, when the hand in his chest ripped out again and reached for Astrid. Something else to sew into his pocket, to never let go of.

His arms went around her, holding her close and listening to her heart beat gently. She was still there with him.

Astrid, though, still didn't know what to do. She held him close, stroked his hair, let him breathe huffs into her chest and hug her tightly, but she couldn't _say _anything. What could she?

The typical "Are you okay?" seemed like a stupid question. She knew he wasn't. But her heart clenched at the broken chief she held. She kissed the crown of his head, continuing to simply hold him until he finally looked up at her, body limp and eyes wet. He looked exhausted, his clothes soaked through, his flight suit pungent.

"You should change." She blurted out, and immediately wished she had chosen something a little more careful for a first words.

Hiccup's gaze didn't falter, like he didn't even hear her. His eyes only pulled her in, his hand at her back tugged her close to him and in an instant he captured her lips.

It wasn't the harsh kiss she was expecting, the one that would pour out every emotion hidden within him. It was soft, yet encompassing. Slow and on a deliberate mission. He kept sinking into her at each part for breath and each recapture of her mouth, pushing her down gently into the grass beneath them and touched her as if she would break at any harsher pressure.

His flight suit was stiff against her, his shirt and pants still sticking to him in a nervous sweat that filled her nostrils. But she

didn't pull away, she couldn't, and she didn't want to. The deeper his hands went, gentle as they ran down her body, stopping at the inside of her thigh before sliding back up, she knew what he was fishing for, whether he was conscious of it or not. It most definitely wasn't the _best _time for that, but Astrid didn't have it within her to deny him.

His eyes didn't focus on her, he was far away even when their gazes met.

It was only when she was down to nothing, her bare back spiked in the grass the moon and stars watching her, Toothless sleeping too closely by them for her comfort that she felt it was right to at least offer a protest.

Hiccup, are you sure, right hereâ€|?" She asked. She had figured they would given the circumstances, though she thought it be after he calmed down, and maybe took a bath.

Her nose wrinkled, at least had finally gotten him out of that flight suit and if they were going to do this than his pants were the next thing to go. But she bit her lip, running a hand up his chest, speckled in hair that felt damp and clammed.

"It'sâ€|not like we haven't done it beforeâ€|" He spoke softly, almost so that Astrid barely heard him.

"I know, just," she curved her palm around his cheek. "You're hurting andâ€|" he silenced her with another kiss.

Hiccup shrugged out of his pants and pulled the blanket over them. He settled into the familiar grooves of her body, keeping winded breaths in her neck while he stopped momentarily, just holding her.

"Don't leave me." Was he managed to get out, and it was all he said as the winter crested grass began to curl with Astrid's movements.

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Valka walked about the village alongside Gobber while he made a headcount, mindlessly trying to take in Berk though realizing it looked just as devastated as when she left, only wrapped in ice than in fire this time.

Gobber stopped her and looked upwards. Their house stabbed with ice, right through the center. The ice had made it all the way to the Great Hall but it seemed almost bitter to everything of Stoick's be crushed in ice.

"Still no differentâ€|" Valka let out a sigh, stepping up on the stoop that lead into the door, frozen over, door broken in. "I left this house with a hole in the roof, after all."

"Hiccup will get this place up and running again, he's got a whole new life to build here after all." Gobber nodded, though he wasn't sure if he was talking to Stoick or Valka at the moment.

"T-tell me, Gobberâ€|"

"Aye?"

"Did they have a good life here?"

"As happy as it could be." Gobber let out a laugh. "But you know those two, always bickering about something, those heads never stopped butting."

Valka took another step to the door, letting her hand run over the post, wood cold and ice freckled.

"And I missed it all."

"You're here now for him, Val. And he needs you nowâ€"

"More than ever, I know, butâ€" She sucked in a breath, a chill going down her throat and carried all the winter that bit into the home, exhaling the fire embers that once coated it as she was carried off. "What if I can't help him, He's lost his father, the parent that raised him the parent thatâ€"

"Stop." Gobber said, softly enough to silence her for the moment. "I'm only gonna let this pity party continue for a little while longer." He turned away, giving her shoulder a pat. "You want to be part of Hiccup's life now, don't ye?"

Valka nodded.

"Well then no more what ifs and what fors." Gobber pointed to the clouds, stars peaking out from the. "And it's not like you won't have help."

"Aye." Valka sat, letting cloud jumper surround her on the steps. Gobber left for a short time, returning with furs to wrap her in before leaving to continue his head count.

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The sun crested over just barely enough to tip the ice and grass with orange.

And Hiccup felt disgusting, comfortable, and miserable all at the same time.

He woke up in Astrid's arms, just as bare as she was, tucked under a blanket and the sun barely cracking into his eyes but it already seemed too bright.

That day was over and a new one was there, but it didn't feel any easier. Astrid let out a sigh, her chest rose against his before she settled back down, grabbing him close in her sleep on impulse. He only vaguely remembered sleeping with her last night, all he could conjure up was the want he had, the steam he had to blow off, an almost primal need to mark her as his own so she wouldn't leave. But he sighed at the fact that it had been impulsive, so much that he barely remembered it. He had to be more careful next time.

The muscles in his neck gave out, and his head flopped on her chest yet again, looking sideways at the cliff side at the sun rise, the fur blanket pulled up to his nose. Toothless was still asleep, and

the village seemed quiet even as the sun rose.

It was going to be one of those days, when Berk didn't rise with the sun but only when everyone felt rested enough to get on their feet.

Though he shuttered at someone finding him rolled up in a blanket after having slept with his girlfriend on a cliff side, but he couldn't will himself to even get up, despite him knowing he needed a bath the way his scent mingled.

He felt a body thud against the back of his leg through the fur and turned a little to see a baby zippleback biting at the blanket.

Hiccup heard Toothless let out a groan, yawning while he did so, but the baby dragon kept biting.

Toothless was over by Hiccup the next moment, biting the collar of the zippleback and carrying it away. The night fury returned after a minute or two of casual whining and unforgiving roars, slumping at a spot right next this rider, though both their eyes kept from meeting each other even if their presence was acknowledged.

Hiccup pulled the furs up, not wanting Toothless to see Astrid, but he was sure the night fury could sense the smell a mile away of what they had been doing. Another careless thing he had done, as he always tried to make sure Toothless _wasn't _there when he slept with Astrid.

"It's just one of those morningsâ€|you know?" Hiccup said, pulling the furs back to his nose when Toothless buried his face in the grass, replying with a ruffling moan that dusted the grass in a bleak morning dew.

I don't have an updating schedule for this one like I do for "A VikingPunk Tale" so but it's only going to be about 4 more chapters after this one, not a very long story, the chapters might be a tad on the longer side later on thoughâ€|? Maybe like once a week if I can manage since my free time is a bit moreâ€|free lately XD

Review and whatnot, it's always good to have feedback. See you all next chapter!

2. Preoccupied Rue

This takes place a week-ish after the first chapter.

Chapter Two: Preoccupied Rue

The cleanup effort for Berk started two days after the defeat of Drago. Though taking to account the massive destruction it was clear the city was more or less to be _rebuilt entirely _than simply cleaned up.

Hiccup had two days to sully in his own before the village looked to him for instruction on what to get started on and while Gobber said he'd take the lead until Hiccup was ready, Hiccup had enough of lying around.

He needed to _do _something, to walk around to busy himself. He has spent the last two days doing literally nothing but lying in the grass with Toothless and looking at the light on the water turn from sunrise to moonlight. Astrid had only gotten him up once to take a bath but even then he just sat in the water while Astrid took care of the rest.

And _that's _how he was starting out his chieftain.

Hiccup and Toothless spent that night awakeâ€”figuring they had slept enough the past two daysâ€”finally taking shaky steps into their house, just as battered as the rest of the village, though not completely destroyed. Hiccup walked inside first, the creak of the wood sounding like it would break even under his slight weight but it didn't collapse, so the dragon entered next. He didn't bother climbing the steps to his own room but started rummaging through the chests in the back storage of the living room.

"Come on Bud, you know what we're looking for, right?" Toothless nodded, taking one chest while Hiccup took the other.

His vision was cloudy as he ripped through the chests of clothes and belts that his father had worn, tears welling up and his heart pounded but his hands kept moving.

His father had always been a brawny guy, big and muscular, but he remembered what his father had showed him back when he was 15.

"_Dad, what's the problem now, what did I do?" Hiccup had asked when Stoick put Astrid in charge of the Dragon Academy for the afternoon to spend a day 'discussing important matters with his son'._

"_You didn't do anything, Son, just we need to talk." Stoick smiled._

"_I swear the twins did itâ€”" Hiccup still tried to protest before it sunk in that he wasn't in trouble. "Oh, um, okayâ€”about what?"_

_Stoick lead him into the house by the arm, going to the clothing chests in the back storage of the living room and opened one of the dustier ones in the corner. He rummaged for a few minutes before pulling out a long tunic, chainmail, and fur cape. _

Hiccup raised a brow, the garment looked older than him.

"_This was the first garb I wore as chief, it belonged to my father when he first became chief as well."_

"_Okayâ€”soâ€”it's a really old piece of clothing?" Hiccup sniffled, the moth balls filling his nose. _

"_No son," Stoick laughed a bit before sitting down, pulling up a chair and patted it. Hiccup sat down while Toothless sniffed the garment before Stoick shooed him off it. "You know, being the son of a chief, you'll be expected to take my place when I retire."_

Hiccup swallowed. "Uh-umâ€|wow Dad, I-Iâ€|" Hiccup had grown up being told Snotlout would be chief, but ever since the defeat of the Red Death, even Hiccup thought that perhaps he could do it, until he had to be acting chief when Stoick was captured by Dagur. Ever since, just the thought of the entire village relying on him while also not taking him seriously left a bad taste in his mouth. He shriveled every time Stoick brought it up, though the alternativeâ€|Snotlout becoming chiefâ€|wasn't very comforting either. _

"_I know your last time being acting chief spooked you a bit, but I believe in you, Hiccup." Stoick smiled, placing the cape loosely over Hiccup's shoulders. "I've always wanted to see you wearing thisâ€|" _

_The garment flopped and sagged to Hiccup's waist and Stoick let out a hearty laugh, one that Hiccup couldn't resist joining in.

_

"_You'll have to grow into a little more though." _

"_Yeahâ€|I don't really see that happening either." Hiccup replied.

_

"_Oh, not to worry son, you'll grow. Besides you'll be sixteen in a few months, you're getting closer to becoming a man." Stoick placed a hand at Hiccup's shoulder. "Which reminds me of another talk we need to have." _

"_Ah, okay, let's put a pin in that for now, gotta go!" Hiccup snaked out of his father's grasp and before Stoick could call for him he and Toothless were out the door and in the sky. _

Hiccup rubbed the tears from his cheeks as Toothless pulled out the garment. Tunic, chainmail, cape and all.

"I hope I've finally grown into this." Hiccup said as he removed his flight suit piece by piece, slipping the tunic over him and grabbing the studded belt. Everything was bigger than it was supposed to be, while it fit him he still couldn't fill it out, but it didn't look like was swallowing him whole like it did when he was 15. Hiccup swung the cape around and placed it on his shoulders, the iron shoulder guards draped over, meant for broader shoulder for sure, but he wore it all, proudly. He _made _it work.

"Soâ€|what do you think, Toothless?" Hiccup asked, his breath seemed to be stuck in his lungs. Toothless perked up his stance, bowing gracefully and supportively to Hiccup while the moonlight shown through the broken through holes in the roof, pouring over Hiccup's shaking stature. "I hope I'll be able to fill this out one day, Dadâ€|." Hiccup inhaled deeply, taking in the moth ball smell he once hated and let it revive him.

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That next morning as the sun peaked over the horizon and Berk finally rose with it was when Hiccup emerged from the broken remains of the chief's home, wearing Stoick's old chief's clothes, cape and loose tunic swaying in the wind and welcoming the new sunlight and cloudless day with forced determination.

Everyone clapped, knowing that the mourning period was over and it was time to rebuild their home.

Hiccup had spent the remainder of the night sitting in Stoick's chair in their living room, drawing up plans for the first legs of the rebuilding to take way. They'd get the Great Hall up and running first, as it was a perfect housing for those without homes, as well as a place to continue cooking meals, as the village had taken to making a fire pit in the center of the Dragon Academy to feed the masses.

The dragon stables would have to expanded to account for the multitude of new dragons that were now inhabited on Berk. Dragons now outnumbered Berkians five to one, but they were all scared, huddled, and trying to cohabitate just as well as anyone else was.

"I'll need you to make sure the dragons behave, so you oversee that the expansion goes well, alright Toothless?" Hiccup mentioned as Valka, Gobber, and Astrid gathered around him in the forge, looking over Hiccup's plans. "Mom!" Hiccup looked up. "You go with Toothless too, you know better than anyone what living conditions dragons like."

Valka smiled, running a quick hand over Hiccup's hair before he got back to assigning Astrid and Gobber to different parts of the village.

"We'll work from the Great Hall and just keep going down until we!" Hiccup continued talking, pointing to his plans but Valka couldn't get over how stoic he looked. She and Gobber noticed right away what garments Hiccup had chosen to wear on his first day of chiefly duties and it sent her back to when Stoick had first become chief. Stepping to the center of the village, mark on his forehead and cape swinging in the wind, his father looking proudly as he stepped down. Though she remembered how scared Stoick really was, knees shaking yet fists steadily gripping his axe.

Valka felt that same twinge of nerves when she had looked up at Stoick, everyone whispering to her that she'd be the chief's wife soon. Valka dismissed the theory despite having dated Stoick for years at that point, but the thought of being chieftain's wife in such an era of war scared her. She'd be expected to wear the furs, the carry the swords, to uphold the duties just as much as Stoick.

Valka looked over at Astrid, discretely holding Hiccup's hand under the table and smiled.

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Gobber was in charge of overseeing the cleanup of the Great Hall. The majority of the Vikings were stationed there, as Hiccup wanted it up and running within two days. Astrid and the other teens were put to doing the first round of cleaning out the Dragon Academy. It wasn't as wrecked as the village, being relatively far from the battle and without a roof to begin with but with so many new dragons needing to be groomed for living on Berk, the Academy would be getting it's fair amount of use.

"I guess I'll be taking over the Academy now, huh?" Fishlegs asked,

putting more ice into the barrel.

"What makes you think it'll be you?" Snotlout grumbled. He hadn't been his usual self since they returned, not a lot of wise cracks left his mouth. He seemed to be rather angry, keeping to himself, brooding and distant. But Astrid looked up, wondering if he was finally going to volunteer himself to take over the Academyâ€|something very _Snotlout _to say. But instead Snotlout met her gaze.

"It'll probably be you." He told her. "You're second in command, after all."

"Not to butt in to matters I don't know about," Eret spoke up, having been pretty quiet, himself, as he cleaned up the ice. "But doesn't typical Viking hierarchy have the chieftain's betrothed be at his side, notâ€|wellâ€|running a dragon academy?"

Everyone gave a look to Eret before looking at Astrid.

"So he finally popped the question?" Fishlegs asked, seeming rather giddy.

"W-what? No! No!" Astrid tried to hide her face turning red and just continued to shove more ice into her barrel. Though it was already full and the shards fell to the ground, breaking into smaller pieces. "We have more pressing matters to deal with than that right now."

"Ah, sorry for bringing up things I shouldn't haveâ€|" Eret slinked back into his own work, not really communicating too heavily with the other riders. He mostly kept to his own as well, walking around Berk like a lost puppy with Skull Crusher always one step behind him.

Astrid sighed at the fact. She wasn't sure if Eret was planning to go back to where he came from or to stay on Berk. Whatever the case he'd stay until Skull Crusher was ready to leave Berk, but stillâ€|

"Hey," Astrid came up to him, getting a new barrel.

"Hey." Eret greeted, though didn't look up at her.

"Soâ€|do you know what you're going to do yet?" She asked. "Going or staying, I mean."

"Don't really have too much of anything to go back to." Eret sighed, taking a big chunk of ice that fell from the top netting of the ring and placing it into the barrel, it broke at the contact.

"So you lived with Drago?"

"I wouldn't really call working for Dragon living." Eret almost laughed bitterly. "Though there was a certain high that went along with dragon trapping."

Astrid wasn't amused and Eret quickly cleared his throat. "B-But I see that it's wrong now."

"Mmm hmmm" Astrid rolled her eyes before they landed on his chest, remembering the branding scar he'd shown them before.

"It's a slavemark of shorts." Eret touched his own chest. "Drago came to my village one night. He said he was looking for able-bodied volunteers to commission dragons for him, but I use the term volunteer very loosely." Eret shut his eyes, placing on last piece of ice into his barrel before he gripped the rims, almost breaking the wood in distraught. "More like I'll kill those who don't want join me and take those too scared to say no." He looked up at Astrid, sorrowed laugh coming up his throat. "I had a betrothed, you know, beautiful girl too took me forever to get her to say yes."

"Really?" Astrid smiled fondly, remembering how long it took her and Hiccup to become an actual couple.

"Yeah I told her I'd come back as soon as I could but then I found out that after Drago took who he needed for dragon trapping he" Eret gripped harder on the rim, hissing out an exhale. Astrid didn't need him to finish the sentence, not after hearing Stoick's story of what Drago had done to the other chiefs. It was clear what had happened to Eret's home as well.

Astrid placed a hand at his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Eret"

"No need to be sorry I've done more than my fair share of bad things as well." He looked over at Skull Crusher, sleeping in the corner. "But I guess we've got a lot more in common than I thought, though when it comes to loss."

"Most dragon and human bonds work like that." Astrid smiled. "You'll be a great rider."

0o0

The next few days went off just so.

The Great Hall, as Hiccup instructed, was fixed up, doors replaced, and re-furnished within two days. The majority of the village was fed and housed there while the rebuilding expanded out beyond the plaza.

Gobber would joke that with five years of no dragon attacks the "small home repairs" drive within them had gotten rusty. But, it still moved along just as well.

Hiccup drew up plans for reconstructing his house, figuring it was time to make it feel new as opposed to simply fixing the structure, especially since Cloud Jumper and Valka would be staying there now.

It was a well oiled machine moving forward, but it wasn't hard to immediately take notice to Hiccup burning the candle at both ends. Each day he'd wake up early, organize the crews, chart down what progress they had made, and then move between helping re-build, continuing plans for further expansion, and running between the different teams.

Bags seemed to make a permanent home under his eyes but his pupils

were always dilated and any time anyone tried to talk to him about something that wasn't rebuilding related, he'd say he was too busy.

During the noon break everyone would stop for two hours to eat lunch and take their dragons out for a fly before getting back to work. For the first few days each dragon would look to Toothless, wandering when he'd dive into the ocean and get them all the fish they needed, but the night fury had no such body for that sort of thing. Valka took the dragons not paired with people out to the ocean, letting them all get their sea legs for testing the waters and fishing on their own.

But, even through all of that, Hiccup always kept working.

"Astrid, take Toothless out for me." Hiccup would say, always in a pass-her-by way. Book filled with paper and plans against his chest and cape floating by as he walked quickly.

Toothless would stand next to Astrid, not looking sad like she expected but seeming lost somehow. The dragon had lately been following Hiccup's every order like it was his complete obligation, though Astrid could only imagine why Toothless felt that way. The reason Hiccup was sufferingâ€|Toothless probably felt like it was his fault.

"Hiccup!" Astrid called out at one of those times, but she was surprised when he actually stopped instead of waving his hand up telling her to get back to him later.

"What is it Astrid?" He asked softly. "I'm kind ofâ€"

"Busy, I know." Astrid sighed, looking at Toothless. He seemed to know what she was going to bring up and shook his head. But Astrid asked anyways. "You know it's been six days since you and Toothless have really flown anywhere. You haven't even touched your flight suit."

Hiccup looked down, biting his lip.

"I told you, I've been busy. Toothless understandsâ€|." Hiccup tried to say it convincingly, but even Astrid could tell he didn't buy his own words.

"Have you two talked yet aboutâ€|about what happened?" Astrid asked softly, placing a hand at his shoulder.

"We don't have to, everything's fine."

"Hiccupâ€|"

"I've gotta go." He turned, cape swinging with him and began to walk away.

"Hicâ€" She called out but Toothless tugged her back, gesturing for her to fly him. "Toothless, I know that you want to be respectful of Hiccup after what happened but you two _need _to talk." She told him, smoothing her hand on his forehead. They both turned and looked at Hiccup, being stopped every five steps by people asking him questions.

A big thud rumbled behind them, and both Astrid and Toothless turned. It was only Eret and Skull Crusher.

"Finally got the hang of flying?" Astrid teased.

"Of course, I'm a natural!" Eret straightened his spine, grinning widely before Skull Crusher moved slightly and he went tumbling off, cheek going smack into the ground. "Any chance you could get your boyfriend to make me one of those saddles?" He asked, spitting out dirt.

"You might want to ask Gobber. Hiccup's kind of got a never ending list of things to do." Astrid sighed.

"Very well." Eret said. "Let's go Skull Cruâ€¦uhâ€¦" Eret looked over at his dragon though it was staring intently at Toothless. The night fury seemed confused at first before he stood more at attention, eyeing Skull Crusher carefully.

"What's going on?" Eret whispered to Astrid but she brushed him off, watching warily.

Skull Crusher began dragging his heels into the dirt, smoke puffing from his nostrils, challenge in his eyes. But Toothless still stood regally, glaring. Skull Crusher didn't seem to back down like the other dragons did, though, and he charged right at Toothless, living up to his name when he sent Toothless across the plaza with one head butt.

"Toothless!" Astrid called out but the night fury was already up. The house he slammed into was already destroyed, but the complete structure of it collapsed at the impact. Toothless let out a roar, eyes flaring. Skull Crusher ran up for another butt, but Toothless dodged it swiftly that time, grabbing the meaty tail of the rumblehorn and dragging the dragon across the dirt. Skull Crusher was twice Toothless size, easily, but the night fury still managed to whip the dragon around.

By then the village began to congregate around the fight, as well as the other dragons.

A swarm of dragons approached Toothless forming a barrier around him and all challenged Skull Crusher. Only then did the rumblehorn back down. The other dragons were still ready to strike but Toothless pushed through the crowd, going straight up to Skull Crusher, softly communicating. "Why?" it seemed.

Skull Crusher's stance slumped, looking exhausted and tired, but certainly not in the mood for Toothless. He shoved past the night fury and went back to his rider, panting heavily. Eret seemed at a loss for what to do, but patted Skull Crusher's snout softly.

"Everyone back to work!" Hiccup called out, walking forward. The Dragons cleared so that Hiccup could make it to Toothless. "Toothless what the heck was that all about? We're trying to rebuild the village not keep on destroying it."

"It wasn't his fault, Hiccup. Skull Crusher seemed to have started

it." Eret said.

Hiccup kept his eyes on Toothless though, and the night fury nodded, looking at Skull Crusher sadly.

Hiccup let out a sigh. "I figured this would happen." He turned to Eret, speaking seriously. "Keep Skull Crusher away from Toothless as much as possible, okay?"

"O-okay." Eret swallowed. "Is this another Alphaâ€|thing?"

"No, Skull Crusher's just taking out his loss on Toothlessâ€|"

Eret blinked a few times before realizing what that meant. "Ohâ€|" he breathed. The rumblehorn had watched Toothless murder his rider, after all.

Hiccup took a quick look at Toothlessâ€|wings, tail, legs.

"You're alright?" He asked Toothless and the night fury nodded, closing his eyes and leaning into Hiccup. He wanted to fly with him, that much was certain. Butâ€|

"Chief!" a worker called out. "Two of the watchtowers just collapsed, they ruined the west half of the construction we were working on."

Hiccup's shoulders slumped. "I'll be right there." He said and walked by Astrid. "Astrid, please do what I told you."

Astrid crossed her arms, frowning. She wanted to smack him for burying himself in his work so much but she couldn't really bring herself to be mad at him for busying himself. But she knew he was just doing it to avoid talking about anything painful. She went up to Toothless who stood quietly and gestured for her to mount him, but she could tell Toothless was sad.

"Give him time, Toothlessâ€|okay?" She said. "Now let's go get Stormfly and we can take a go round to Dragon Island."

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The night rolled over again, and the great hall was filled with people settling down to eat and sleep.

Hiccup kept to himself, though, eating in the forge. The roof was a little tattered, but other than that the structure of the forge had remained upright. And though the extra draft over his head was giving him a bit of a sneeze, Hiccup enjoyed the privacy. That is, as far as he knew, he was alone, but heard a few stray jostles of metal in the background and sighed, pulling back the curtains.

"Astrid, I want to be alone right nâ€|" Hiccup started, only to see Gobber come in, a plate a food with him, though he looked a bit baffled when he saw Hiccup was already eating.

"Ah, I was told you skulked off and hadn't eaten anything." Gobber said, already shoving the chicken leg in his mouth as he spoke. "Good to know Astrid was wrong."

"You all don't have to worry about me so much, I already have enough to deal with."

"Exactly." Gobber sat down. Hiccup's study was still rather small and cramped for anyone bigger than him, Gobber still couldn't fathom how Hiccup and Astrid did half the things he heard them doing in the small space, but nonetheless Hiccup always ran there when he had a problem that, very rarely, wasn't solved with flying.

Gobber looked down at Hiccup's desk, an entire file worth of papers all scribbled and charted with plans for buildings.

"No one's asking you to remodel the whole village, Hiccup." Gobber said.

"I knowâ€|but might as well change things a little since everything's so differentâ€|." Hiccup turned away, going back to taking sparse nibbles on his food and broad strokes with his charcoal stick. Gobber stilled his hand, perking Hiccup's chin up.

"You taken a good look at yourself lately?" Gobber asked, and Hiccup shoved his hand away.

"I have a lot to do." Hiccup said.

"Sounds more like you have a lot to avoid." Hiccup stopped drawing at Gobber's word, looking up at him with a snide side glance. His lip tugged, furling before he bit it down, stifling any response he would've uttered. He didn't want to hear any of it, not now.

"You've barely even been around Toothless. How long are you going to avoid that big bewilderbeast in the room?" Gobber kept prodding. Hiccup knew that method, get him angry and emotional and then he'd spill everything about what was wrong. But Hiccup couldn't afford to feel like that. A chief had to be the stable when everyone else was emotionally wrecked. His father was the prime exampleâ€|and he had to live up to it. He had his time rolling around in mourning, now he had to be chief.

"If you're going toâ€|" Gobber kept talking and Hiccup stood, slammed down his hands on his drawings, absent-mindedly smudging the canvases.

"I said I'm fine!" Hiccup yelled but his breathing was heavy, his emotions were boiling up, a hot geyser ready to erupt. "Toothless is okay tooâ€|he knowsâ€|" Hiccup sat down, covering his face with his arms, breathing heavy. "He knows I don't blame him."

"Are you sure?" Gobber asked. "Have you two talked?"

"We don't have toâ€|"

"Hiccupâ€|."

"Please just go." Hiccup shook his head uttering for the millionth time "I have a lot of work to do."

Gobber stood that time, patting Hiccup's back a little, wanting to say one more thing in parting but he saw Hiccup's back begin to hunch up and down.

Hiccup hadn't shed a tear since those first two days. He had hated that raw feeling he had when he woke up that morning on top of Astrid his face sullied and body numb and quivering. When she put him in the bath and he couldn't even raise his hands to wash himself. But just then, one tear came from his eye, and more just kept following. Each drop landed on his layouts, running the charcoal down in long black lines.

"Gobberâ€|" Hiccup spoke even though the blacksmith had left a while ago. "Why'd you have to bring that up?" Hiccup kept talking. "Geezâ€|now I'm not going to finish these plansâ€|"

He spent the whole night in there, crying so long he forgot half the things he was even crying about. Hiccup feared a week's worth of tears were coming down and it seemed like hours before he finally just fell asleep, mouth tasting of salt tears and the charcoal on the papers that he plopped his head on when he finally shut his eyes.

Though all Hiccup could do was wish for the morning sun to burn his eyes and wake him up. Each night he worked until he dropped, a clear and dead asleep mind incapable of dreaming or reliving old memories. Though this night his mind was open, his dreams fresh, and the one thing he didn't want to see replayed all night as he slept.

Toothless killing his father.

Toothless killing his father.

Toothless killing his father.

Hiccup awoke that morning feeling like he had wrestled with Alvin the Treacherous, his body heavy, and his neck not able to hold his head up any more. His eyes cut over to his shoulders, a blanket was draped over him, not of his own accord. He figured at first it was Gobber but when a morning breeze ghosted over the sweat on his brow and picked the curtain to the outside of the forge Hiccup saw Toothless sleeping just outside.

Of course Toothless had covered him with a blanket while he was dreamingâ€|of course he was still just as kind as ever even though all Hiccup would see was those slit eyes and mouth steaming and panting after blasting his father. Hiccup blinked rapidly, trying to get the image out, though Toothless kept flicking in his mind, docile to primitive.

The night fury seemed to open an eye just as Hiccup stirred, the curtain kept blowing, each glance of Toothless made Hiccup swallow.

"Hey, bud." Hiccup greeted. Though what he feared came to fruition. He had spent all night replaying that scene in his head, and now it was a permanent daydream every time he saw his best friend.

****Next chapter-ish: Toothless and Skull Crusher have got a score to settle, Hiccup just keeps that steady spiral into no man's land, and yes Astrid and Valka will talk so keep your skirts on.****

I got a lot of reviews for last chapter like more than I expectedâ€¦I usually answer them all individually at the end of the chapter but it's a lot soâ€¦I'll just answer the main points that I noticed popped up:

Some of the other teens will be briefly touched on, but it's really a story about the main peepsâ€¦sorry.

No, I hadn't planned on Alvin from the TV series being in this story. I mean I might get a random (I feel like changing the plot) moment while writing this, but as of right now I hadn't planned on it.

No one's getting pregnant in this story.

I won't be writing from Toothless's point of view, per say. He's not a speaking character so everything about his actions are relative. Whenever I write for Toothlessâ€¦with the exception of one of my other storiesâ€¦I always make it an "action-based" kind of thing.

So yeah, hope that clears the air, thanks for the nice responses after just one chapter!

End
file.